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THE HIGHER LOVE

A PLEA FOR A NOBLER CON-
CEPTION OF HUMAN LOVE

By

GEORGE BARLOW

*Author of "The Pageant of
Life," "Vox Clamantis," etc.*

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THE HIGHER LOVE

I

I DO not think there is any subject on which, even after all these centuries of thought and conflict, more misunderstanding prevails, more inextricable chaos and confusion, than the subject of love. On the one hand we have a school of thought which elects to believe that man has been evolved from the lower animals, and that love and passion have been slowly developed during the lengthy and terrible process. To this class of thinkers love is in its origin an animal instinct. It has been to some extent purified, but passion still remains in its essence animal: an ignoble thing, indeed almost an ugly thing: a thing to suppress as far as possible, and to indulge in, when necessary, with a sort of apology to oneself and one's humanity.

There has, however, during recent years arisen another and a far different school of thought. Such men as Maeterlinck and Laurence Oliphant have believed that in human love and passion, rightly apprehended, lies the key to all esoteric and heavenly mysteries. Maeterlinck's article "On Women" in his curious volume of Essays, "The Treasure of the Humble," is most suggestive in this connection. In one passage he says: "Besides their primitive instincts, all women

“ have communications with the unknown that
“ are denied to us. Great is the distance that
“ separates the best of men from the treasures of
“ the second boundary ; and, when a solemn
“ moment of life demands a jewel from this
“ treasure, they no longer remember the paths
“ that thither lead, and vainly offer to the im-
“ perious, undeceivable circumstance the false
“ trinkets that their intellect has fashioned.
“ But the woman never forgets the path that
“ leads to the centre of her being ; and no matter
“ whether I find her in opulence or in poverty,
“ in ignorance or in fulness of knowledge, in
“ shame or in glory, do I but whisper one word
“ that has truly come forth from the virgin depths
“ of my soul, she will retrace her footsteps along
“ the mysterious paths that she has never for-
“ gotten, and without a moment’s hesitation will
“ she bring back to me, from out her inexhaustible
“ stores of love, a word, a look, or a gesture that
“ shall be no less pure than my own. It is as
“ though her soul were ever within call ; for
“ by day and night is she prepared to give answer
“ to the loftiest appeals from another soul ;
“ and the ransom of the poorest is undistinguish-
“ able from the ransom of a queen.”

That is a very beautiful and illuminating utterance, and to me it seems to indicate that we have reached an entirely new point in the history of the relation between man and woman. Think for a moment of Balzac’s view of women ! To him they were simply a set of savage tigresses, consumed with an endless passion of jealousy, tempting men, lying in wait for one another,

beautiful but mercenary, clever but unscrupulous, industrious but chiefly industrious in carrying out their own selfish ends. Glance over modern French literature—read the novels of Marcel Prévost, Zola, Guy de Maupassant, and a host of others, and you will find much the same leading idea.

Now who is right? Maeterlinck, or Balzac and the French writers?

In a certain sense, no doubt, both are right. That is to say, the two classes of writers are looking at opposite sides of woman's character, at different women, or at the same woman under differing circumstances and at differing periods of her life. None the less, the net divergence of view is immense. If woman's "soul" is "ever within call," if "by day and night she is prepared to give answer to the loftiest appeals from another soul," she certainly is not what Balzac thought her. Neither is she—and this is a very important point—what she imagines herself to be, for I suppose there are very few women who would not think Maeterlinck's view of womanhood somewhat overdrawn and fantastic.

What is really taking place, I believe, is this. In the course of human evolution, we have arrived at a point when it is possible, owing to the increased delicacy and sensitiveness of the human brain and nervous system, for higher influences to convey to our minds many ideas which they were not previously able to grasp and assimilate. Some of these may be ideas which the human race once possessed, but which

it has lost. The Power which guides and propels mankind seems to be endeavouring to raise enormously our standard of love. On the other hand, opposing powers appear to be struggling to thwart and hinder the progress which, in some directions, is certainly being made. "We must be heedful; it is not without fit reason that our soul bestirs itself," Maeterlinck says.

The great danger to guard against seems to me to be the tendency in certain writers—as in the case of Tolstoy and Laurence Oliphant—to suggest that, in seeking after "the higher life," natural passion is a thing that should be forcibly suppressed, and, if possible, eliminated. I believe that to be a very dangerous mistake. Laurence Oliphant fell into it in both those strange and interesting books of his, "Scientific Religion" and "Sympneumata." What is wanted is not the suppression of passion, but the spiritualisation of passion. Shelley's much misunderstood "Epipsychidion" and Rossetti's almost equally misunderstood love-sonnets marked a very distinct and important step in this direction. It is singular that such an immensely spiritual conception of physical love should have been given to the world by two English poets. One would hardly have expected, whatever the intermixture of blood may have been in Rossetti's case, that any poets of the Anglo-Saxon race could have reached such a transcendental mode of regarding the passion of love.

Take the following lines from the "Epipsychidion":—

“ Warm fragrance seems to fall from her light dress
And her loose hair ; and when some heavy tress
The air of her own speed has disentwined,
The sweetness seems to satiate the faint wind ;
And in the soul a wild odour is felt,
*Beyond the sense,** like fiery dews that melt
Into the bosom of a frozen bud.—
See where she stands ! a mortal shape indued
With love and life and light and deity,
And motion which may change but cannot die.”

* * * *

“ At length into the obscure Forest came
The Vision I had sought through grief and shame.
Athwart that wintry wilderness of thorns
Flashed from her motion splendour like the Morn’s,
And from her presence life was radiated
Through the grey earth and branches bare and dead ;
So that her way was paved, and roofed above .
With flowers as soft as thoughts of budding love ;
And music from her respiration spread
Like light,—all other sounds were penetrated
By the small, still, sweet spirit of that sound,
So that the savage winds hung mute around ;
And odours warm and fresh fell from her hair
Dissolving the dull cold in the frore air.”

* * * *

“ And we will talk, until thought’s melody
Become too sweet for utterance, and it die
In words, to live again in looks which dart
With thrilling tone into the voiceless heart,
Harmonizing silence without a sound.
Our breath shall intermix, our bosoms bound,
And our veins beat together ; and our lips
With other eloquence than words, eclipse
The soul that burns between them, and the wells
Which boil under our being’s inmost cells,
The fountains of our deepest life, shall be
Confused in passion’s golden purity,
As mountain-springs under the morning sun.”

* The italics in these quotations are my own.

Take next Rossetti's wonderful sonnet, "The Kiss" :—

"What smouldering senses in death's sick delay
Or seizure of malign vicissitude
Can rob this body of honour, or denude
This soul of wedding raiment worn to-day?
For lo! even now my lady's lips did play
With these my lips such consonant interlude
As laurelled Orpheus longed for when he wooed
The half-drawn hungering face with that last lay.
I was a child beneath her touch,—a man
When breast to breast we clung, even I and she,—
A spirit when her spirit looked through me,—
A god when all our life-breath met to fan
Our life-blood, till love's emulous ardours ran,
Fire within fire, desire in deity."

I do not think the real meaning of such writing as this has been at all apprehended as yet. Surely it implies that, in such men as the two poets above quoted, an altogether exceptional condition of the brain and nervous system existed, which enabled them to enter sacred *penetralia* of love, the gates of which are as yet closed to ordinary mortals. Shelley and Rossetti were organically different from others: that is the point. They possessed senses which others do not possess; or, which comes to the same thing, the usual senses were in them developed to so fine and keen a pitch that they amounted, practically, to entirely new senses.

But what I am chiefly desirous of insisting on—I believe it to be more momentous than most of us yet realise—is that, though the two poets in question were dealing with passion, physical

passion, the passion had been subjected within the organism of each to so wonderful and refining a process that it had actually become, it *was*, spiritual passion. And by this I mean to convey far more than would be suggested by merely saying that in these poets love was peculiarly ethereal and refined. I mean that actual atomic changes had taken place by which physical atoms had been converted into what we may call soul-atoms. If St. Paul's (and Swedenborg's) doctrine of the "spiritual body" means anything at all, it clearly means that within, or closely connected with, our visible bodies, another body—for so we must call it—exists, in which all the organs of the visible body are represented, though in a purer and nobler form or condition.

Now, in regard to the higher love, and love-poetry of the higher order, the point is this: that we are almost beginning to discern that in passion so pure and spiritual as that experienced and described by Rossetti, Shelley, and some others, it is really the "living soul," which Dr. Wallace speaks of, the *soul-body*, which is acting, hardly the outward body at all. If this be so, when Rossetti, in the sonnet called "Secret Parting," wrote:—

"As she kissed, her mouth became her soul,"

and in "Love-Lily":—

*"Whose speech Truth knows not from her thought,
Nor Love her body from her soul,"*

he was face to face with a secret far more solemn

and wonderful than he himself, I should imagine, had the slightest idea of. He was, in fact, face to face, in actual contact, with the "living soul," the physical soul, if we may so describe it, of the woman he loved. *The glory that drew him was the glory of the angel within the woman, visible for a moment to the angel within himself.*

Does not this suggest vast regions of thought as yet untraversed? Has it not a very intimate connection with Dr. Wallace's theory that this planet may, after all, be the very centre of things, and that its chief end may be to develop within "the perishable body" "the living "soul" of man, "the living soul" of woman?

But, not to wander from the poetic standpoint, is it not increasingly clear that a marvellous development, unnoticed by most of us, has recently been taking place in the poetic conception of love? It would have been impossible for Shakespeare or Spenser to write of love as Rossetti and Shelley wrote of it. Study Shakespeare's and Spenser's sonnets, and other sonnets of their period. You will not find the remotest suggestion of the kind of love that Shelley and Rossetti had in their mind. Nor, of course, is any such conception of love discoverable in the more ancient poets of the world's history. There is nothing of it in Horace, or Virgil, or Ovid, or Catullus: nothing of it in Homer, or the Greek dramatists.

Moreover, I believe that a strange haunting sense that the passion they expressed was in its essence spiritual, not material, is the very

thing that has led to so much distressing failure and aberration among artists, by isolating them from the rest of mankind, and rendering it often impossible for them in any real sense to convey their meaning to others. I do not think that the love of the higher and more sensitive among the poets refers mainly to anything earthly or carnal or visible, but to something unseen as yet and spiritual ; and I think that, even in their wildest and most incomprehensible moments—in the wildest poems, for instance, of a man like Edgar Allan Poe—they are really, though perhaps sometimes half unconsciously, grasping and struggling after this.

“Thou wast that all to me, love,
For which my soul did pine—
A green isle in the sea, love,
A fountain and a shrine,
All wreathed with fairy fruits and flowers,
And all the flowers were mine.

“And all my days are trances,
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy dark eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams—
In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams.”

That does not refer to earthly love at all, but to something inconceivably higher and sweeter. Indeed, the central difficulty of the poetic temperament appears to me to arise at this very point. If poets sing of ordinary passion and its outcome, they are called sensual. If they sing of the mystical heaven of their highest

visions, and the sacred love which dwells there, they are called madmen and dreamers. At no possible point of their characters, as it seems, are they ever doomed to have contact with ordinary flesh and blood, or to win, at any rate during their lives, the sympathy of ordinary men. And that they, even the highest of them, do crave for this sympathy, and are often stung to bitterest pain by the perpetual refusal of it, there can be no doubt.

It often seems to me that the so-called "fleshly" school of poetry, of which Morris, Swinburne and Rossetti were the leaders, was, if one looks a little below the surface, a profoundly spiritual "school." Can any reasonable thinker doubt that the passion described in Swinburne's "Tris-tram of Lyonesse" is spiritual passion? That lovely line—

"The wind and light and odour of her hair,"

spoken by Tristram, while lying on his death-bed, awaiting the advent of Iseult, is as spiritual and transcendental as the lines I have italicised in the previous quotation from Shelley's "Epipsy-chidion." I have not space to quote the description of Iseult's eyes at the beginning of the poem, or the description of the beauty of Iseult herself. Refer to it, and you will see that the poet is not describing a woman at all. He is describing an angel, a transfigured woman. He is describing the angel-form, the angel-face, *within* what we blindly call the form and face. We are blind; the poet and the lover *see*.

The supreme sense of form possessed by such an artist as Théophile Gautier is, in fact, a spiritual sense. The chance of reconciliation between Art and Religion lies at this point. When it is once realised that love is intended to be divine and eternal, and that love, to be divine and eternal, must be divinely and eternally expressed through a human but spiritual body, we shall begin to see daylight. Asceticism will vanish on the one hand, and coarse self-indulgence on the other. The human form will once more become what it was to the Greeks, the incarnation of the divine, but to us it will appear even more divine, because we shall realise that it was not moulded for time, but for eternity.

We shall also realise that Rossetti's conception of the sacramental nature of physical love * was not blasphemous, as shallow thinkers have imagined, but, on the contrary, profoundly solemn and significant.

"O thou who at Love's hour ecstatically
Unto my lips dost evermore present
The body and blood of Love in sacrament"

—these lines, which originally appeared at the commencement of the sonnet entitled "Love's Redemption," were afterwards somewhat altered and toned down by Rossetti, in deference, I suppose, to a foolish and uninstructed public opinion.

* Coventry Patmore was deeply impressed by the same idea.

But surely the poet was right in his first idea : wonderfully, immeasurably right. He had instinctively grasped the deep spiritual truth that Tennyson also reached (at rare moments) and expressed in "The Leper's Bride" :

" This coarse diseaseful creature which in Eden was divine,

This Satan-haunted ruin, this little city of sewers,
This wall of solid flesh that comes between your soul and mine,

Will vanish and give place to the beauty that endures.

" The beauty that endures on the Spiritual height,
When we shall stand transfigured, like Christ on Hermon hill,

And moving each to music, soul in soul and light in light,

Shall flash through one another in a moment as we will."

The *consensus* of testimony to the character of spiritual love grows more and more remarkable, the more closely one studies the subject. There is, however, a difference between Tennyson and such writers as Shelley and Rossetti. The difference is really due to organic differences in the nerve-systems of the poets. Neither Rossetti nor Shelley would have written the first stanza I have quoted from Tennyson. Nor, I think, would Mr. Swinburne or Victor Hugo* have

* Victor Hugo wrote :

*" Chair de la femme ! argile idéale ! O merveille !
O pénétration sublime de l'esprit
Dans le limon que l'Être ineffable pétrit !
Matière où l'âme brille à travers son suaire !
Boue où l'on voit les doigts du divin statuaire !*

written it. Tennyson did not fully apprehend the dawning truth that the souls can occasionally, even here in this present life, dispense with the "wall of solid flesh," and "flash through one "another in a moment as " they "will."

"Twain halves of a perfect heart, made fast
Soul to soul while the years fell past,"

Mr. Swinburne wrote in "The Triumph of Time," and that again touches the ultimate goal of passional joy and victory. The thing is no metaphor. It is scientifically, materially, true. In all noble sex-love there is an actual atomic mingling, an interlocking and embracing of atoms, a whole miraculous unseen process—what would to-day be called a sub-surface, or sub-liminal process—which takes place far within the depths of the ordinary consciousness, but which reaches to the surface and becomes self-conscious in the cases of some highly refined and poetic organisms. The mystery of supreme love lies in the atomic mingling of what Oliphant calls the "fluid" bodies, the "bisexual" frames.

*Fange auguste appelant le baiser et le cœur,
Si sainte qu'on ne sait, tant l'amour est vainqueur,
Tant l'âme est vers ce lit mystérieux poussée,
Si cette volupté n'est pas une pensée,
Et qu'on ne peut, à l'heure où les sens sont en feu,
Étreindre la beauté sans croire embrasser Dieu !"*
La Légende des Siècles.

I think this is one of the most striking instances in poetry—as far as my knowledge extends—of the more exalted and transcendental method of regarding human passion.

Whether he is right in his surmise that, after all, we have fallen from an angelic degree of passional existence, and are slowly groping our way back towards its pure and ecstatic conditions, I do not know. But I think that even the few passages I have quoted from modern poets—and they might be indefinitely multiplied—when carefully considered, seem to show that he may be right. And, if he is right, what vast vistas of possibility are beginning to open out before the eyes of planetary man—the majestic possibility of confronting earth with heaven, and of living the old lost passional life of heaven here again upon a redeemed and reawakened earth.

Only bear in mind that soul and body must go together, must work in unison. It seems to me that at the period when Christianity made its appearance, this was not sufficiently realised. I remember that Mr. Hardy, in "Tess," makes one of his characters suggest that it would have been a happier thing for the world, had the religion which was to redeem it come from Greece, instead of from Palestine. I will not go so far as to say this, though the late Professor Clifford would no doubt have been an eager supporter of the idea. But I will say that I sometimes wish that St. Paul had been a poet, instead of a metaphysical thinker. His description of the struggle between "the flesh and the "spirit," from the point of view of to-day, seems to me somewhat misleading, and, moreover, most likely to mislead those who, so to speak, least deserve to be misled, viz., the most enthusiastic and aspiring human spirits.

For, to-day, we are able to discern that the flesh and the spirit are really differing sides of the same thing. They ought not to struggle against one another. The true function of the flesh is to express the spirit ; in fact, as suggested above, to be gradually converted into spirit. Unless the soul, or the soul-body, has aural nerves, it cannot hear heavenly music ; unless it possesses nerves of smell, it cannot inhale and enjoy the fragrance of heavenly roses. St. Paul hardly seems to have realised the full significance of his own doctrine of the "spiritual body," or, if he did so, most certainly his more fanatical followers have signally failed in that respect. It was, however, fully realised by Swedenborg, and the poets seem lately to have been teaching us that if earthly passion has to be expressed through an earthly body, heavenly passion must be expressed, more purely and therefore more intensely through a heavenly body, a body still material, but material in a finer and less perishable sense.



II

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF MATTER

CAN matter, at a certain point, and subject to a certain degree of soul-pressure, undergo transfiguration? Can it be transformed into spirit? Can the human body be to an unsuspected extent refined and ennobled? One desires to speak upon this subject with caution and reverence, for we are treading upon holy ground and touching upon the most sacred truths of the universe. But surely it must occur to the thoughtful mind that in the transfiguration of Christ, followed by His resurrection, we have the crowning historic instance of matter passing into spirit. We do not grasp the immense significance of all that is daily occurring in us and around us. Christ, the great example, followed in His growth and development the road which should be normal and natural with all of us. With us, the thing breaks down; the true line of development is not followed, or is only partially followed. Sin hinders and thwarts us. And by "sin" I do not mean merely outward infringements of the moral code. I mean all violation of the cardinal laws of the universe, whether physical or spiritual.

All such laws have to be patiently studied and implicitly obeyed, if the desired end—spiritual progress and ultimate spiritual triumph—is to be reached.

These few words will have led the way to what I specially wish to suggest—that the bearing of the great Christian doctrines of transfiguration and resurrection on human love has not yet been recognised. It is just at this point that I have to join issue with some of those who have criticised my article, “On the Higher “Love.”* Shakespeare’s sonnets, they say, represent a conception of love as high as that which is found in the verses of Rossetti and Shelley. But surely this cannot be maintained. Listen to some of the stanzas from Rossetti’s poem, “The Stream’s Secret,” perhaps the most beautiful poem ever inspired by a passionate yearning after the soul and form of a deeply loved being removed by death :—

“ But she is far away
Now ; nor the hours of night grown hoar
Bring yet to me, long gazing from the door,
The wind-stirred robe of roseate grey
And rose-crown of the hour that leads the day
When we shall meet once more.

“ Oh sweet her bending grace
Then when I kneel beside her feet ;
And sweet her eyes’ o’erhanging heaven ; and sweet
The gathering folds of her embrace ;
And her fall’n hair at last shed round my face
When breaths and tears shall meet.

* *Contemporary Review*, January, 1904.

"Beneath her sheltering hair,
In the warm silence near her breast,
Our kisses and our sobs shall sink to rest ;
As in some still trance made aware
That day and night have wrought to fullness there
And Love has built our nest."

There is nothing of this sort in Shakespeare's sonnets, nor, I think, anywhere in Shakespeare,* the simple reason being that in his day the inner soul had not come near enough to the surface to make its influence strongly felt, even among poets. At Shakespeare's epoch the human nervous system was undoubtedly a far rougher and less developed thing than it is among the most sensitive organisms of to-day. It could not receive and register impressions which are to-day received and registered not in one instance, but in many. Rossetti was practically *in* the next world, and was, I cannot doubt, in the closest possible communion with the living spirit of the woman he so deeply loved, when he wrote the beautiful lines I have quoted. The barrier between the seen and the unseen is yielding to the prayers of loving hearts and the pressure of loving hands: the "door of opal" is unclosing.

So also Tennyson, in the famous passage in "In Memoriam" in which he addresses the spirit of Arthur Hallam, is describing no dream, no mere vision, but an actual living experience, an actual organic blending of soul with soul. These spiritual phenomena are, in a profound

* The "Husband, I come!" of Cleopatra would perhaps be nearest in spirit to Rossetti's thought.

sense, material. They are as material, and even more real, than the human grasp of hand and hand, or touch of lip and lip.

So with Browning :—

“ Do I hold the Past

Thus firm and fast

Yet doubt if the future hold I can ?

This path so soft to pace shall lead

Through the magic of May to herself indeed !

Or narrow if needs the house must be,

Outside are the storms and strangers : we

Oh, close, safe, warm sleep I and she,

—I and she ! ”

“ That, indeed, is passionate enough,” as Mr. Stopford Brooke remarked in his interesting book on Browning, and it is passion, not of a far-off, abstract, unreal heaven, but honest, warm, human passion, though pure as the sunlight and tender with infinite spiritual tenderness. Passion of this sort involves and implies the resurrection of the body, the transformation and transfiguration of matter. The late Bishop of Durham, in his extremely thoughtful work, “ The Gospel of the Resurrection,” said : “ Our present body is as the seed of our future body. The one rises as naturally from the other as the flower from the germ. ‘ It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption : ‘ it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory : ‘ it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power : ‘ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.’ We cannot, indeed, form any conception of the change which shall take place,

“except so far as is shown in the Person of the Lord. Its fulfilment is in another state, and our thoughts are bound by this state. But there is nothing against reason in the analogy. Every change of life which we can observe now must be from one material form to another equally falling under our senses; but such a change may help us to understand how a form at present sensible may pass through a great crisis into another, which is an expression of the same law of life, though our present senses cannot naturally take cognizance of it.”

These are most pregnant words. Their suggestive import is immense. Dr. Westcott, naturally, did not push the thought into the region of poetry and poetic love. But he provided us with *data*, whence vast inferences may be drawn, inferences of which I think he would have recognised the force, though they lie somewhat outside the sphere of his habitual meditations.

Take now a few verses from a poem written by Philip Bourke Marston, the blind poet, loved and revered by so many of us, whose tragic life closed in the year 1887. In the poem* entitled, “A Dream,” the singer tells us how he

“Sat one evening all alone,
In chambers haunted by old memories.”

Then, suddenly, he

“Heard a voice, and lo!
That voice was like the wind’s voice having speech.”

* This poem may be found in the volume Marston published in 1875, under the title of “All in All.”

Twice he hears the voice of the woman he had loved calling to him from the unknown. Twice he hurries to the door, but meets only

“The rush of rain,
And sweep of winds down leaf-strewn garden-ways.”

Yet a third time the well-remembered voice calls to him “from very far,” telling him that she whom he so loved on earth has kept faith with him, is still near him, is longing to clasp his form in her arms, and that “*this is truth.*”

Then : —

“Stung by those words, I could but count as vain,
I flung the door back as in last disproof,
And there withal rushed in the wind and rain,
And there I saw the bleak night's starless roof,
And there and then I heard a voice divine,
And there two cold sweet hands took hold of mine,
And there a stormy star shone out for sign ;
But all things were accomplished. ‘Oh, my Love,
Meet we so even in my dreams again !’

“I brought her in, and hardly could believe
For joy what was ; I know I could not speak,
I know I wept, yet not as those who grieve,
I know her breath and lips were on my cheek,
I know I could not for a little space
Lift up my eyes and look upon her face ;
I know at last we met in wild embrace,
I know I felt her lips to my lips cleave,
And how I fell, by joy's excess made weak ;

“And how my hands were fain her hair to stroke,
Soft hair and bright, and how she bowed, and said—

And these, I think, were the first words she spoke—
‘Oh, Love, lay back upon my breast thy head,
Great love alone is changeless amid change;
Love hath the entire universe to range,
And hearts that love even death cannot estrange.’

At that word,—death, afresh the old wounds bled;
I turned to clasp her once again, and woke.”

The poem in which these lovely lines occur has been almost forgotten. Even Marston's name now, alas! seems to have faded from the mind of our prosaic, passionless generation. But such a poem has eternal value, if anything has eternal value. Once more, in the clearest fashion, it asserts the truth that St. Paul proclaimed and that Dr. Westcott was contending for; the truth—do not let us call it the dogma—of the resurrection of the body. Changed, transformed, glorified, triumphant, transfigured,—use what images and metaphors you will, the great unalterable fact is there. The woman Marston loved had died, but yet she lived.* She *did* come to him, she *did* long for him, she *did* speak to him, she *was* close to him, closer, far closer, than ever in life. It was no “dream.”

The question has to do with the gradual development of human nerve-sensitiveness and consequent susceptibility to spiritual impressions. We do not find any evidence that Shakespeare and the poets of his day were organically capable of passion so intense as that which throbs through the verses I have quoted from Rossetti, Browning, Marston. It is not, as I need hardly say,

* “The dead are not dead, but alive.”—Tennyson.

a question of degree or weight of genius. It is a question of historic organic progress. Passion sufficiently intense and also sufficiently pure to effect an actual change in the organism is of very rare occurrence, and in Shakespeare's time it is doubtful whether the human nervous system had been brought to the point of bearing the tremendous strain it involves. Passion that can change the body into the soul, not metaphorically, but by actual material transformation, cannot often exist upon earth.

" We had grown as gods, as the gods above,
Filled from the heart to the lips with love,
Held fast in his hands, clothed warm with his wings,
O love, my love, had you loved but me !"*

And again :—

*" We had stood/as the sure stars stand, and moved
As the moon moves, loving the world; and seen
Grief collapse as a thing disproved,
Death consume as a thing unclean."*

And yet again :—

*" Not all strong things had severed us then ;
Not wrath of gods, nor wisdom of men,
Nor all things earthly, nor all divine,
Nor joy nor sorrow, nor life nor death."*

That is all intensely modern, and its singular mixture of the sensuous and the supra-sensual, the human and the divine, the mortal and the immortal, is an entirely new growth of thought. The form of brain capable of experiencing such emotion takes centuries to mould in the strange

* The italics, of course, are my own.

laboratory of the universe. What would Horace have thought of such love as this, love which, though the poet himself probably did not pause to analyse his feeling, for the moment, at any rate, lifted the soul to a region beyond all possible loss and death?

A writer in the *Pall Mall Gazette* who criticised my article "On the Higher Love," remarked: "So far as the spiritual nature of love goes, the idea is so far from being modern that it is the keynote of two of the most significant of Plato's works, the 'Phædrus' and the 'Symposium.' Mr. Barlow's essay is really a study on Platonism by one who is apparently ignorant of his master."

But examine the Platonism that ran riot among the English poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Read Mr. Harrison's book,* and you will see that the whole conception of love, both in Plato and as rendered Platonically by those poets, was fantastic, unreal and metaphysical. It is based on the negation of passion, whereas the love I was dealing with involves the transfiguration of the body. It is the very idea that I was combating. The English poets of the nineteenth century, implicitly, if not always consciously, had grown beyond it. Every one of them who dealt with passion—Swinburne, Rossetti, Morris, Buchanan, Browning, Patmore, Tennyson, and many others

* "Platonism in English Poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," by John Smith Harrison. Macmillan.

—had reached immeasurably higher and purer ground.

“There was a time,” says Plato, in the “Phædrus,” “when we were admitted to the sight of apparitions, innocent and simple and calm and happy, which we held shining in pure light, pure ourselves and not yet enshrined in that living tomb which we carry about, now that we are imprisoned in the body, like an oyster in his shell.”* Thus the body to Plato was a “living tomb.” It was not the expression of the soul, but the prison of the soul. To him the body hindered the growth and beauty of the soul, and the best thing was to have done with it and cast it off as soon as possible, so as to return to previous disembodied conditions.

That was Plato’s idea. How completely different this is from the idea involved in the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body! The latter, surely, is the higher and nobler idea, and the poets of the nineteenth century were intensely convinced of this in their inmost hearts, though they did not reason the matter out.

Hear how Tristram’s passion of love for Iseult expresses itself, when he knows that this life is at an end, and that he and she are standing on the verge of the unseen :—

“O mine own,
O mine and no man’s yet save mine alone,
Iseult! what ails thee that I lack so long
All of thee, all things thine for which I long?
For more than watersprings to shadeless sands,

* “Phædrus,” 250.

More to me were the comfort of her hands
Touched once, and more than rays that set and rise
The glittering arrows of her glorious eyes,
More to my soul than summer's to the south
The mute clear music of her amorous mouth,
And to my heart's heart more than heaven's great rest
The fullness of the fragrance of her breast." *

That is not "Platonic." It is far higher and purer than anything Platonic. It is all bodily, no doubt—"passionate enough," to use Mr. Brooke's expression once again, but it is passion purified and enlarged and transfigured. It is an instance of the transfiguration of matter, a literal instance, for the Iseult whom Tristram described in those divinely beautiful words was, as he saw her, "clothed upon" with visible immortality. The Church that believes in "the resurrection of the body *and* the life everlasting," has, after all, hit upon, or been led to perceive, the exact illuminating truth.

The Platonic "idea" that first floated about, as Plato thought, somewhere in space, and then descended into a mortal body, *gained* by association with a body, if that body was beautiful and complete. Without a body, it could not express itself. What would the "idea" of Iseult have been without the form of Iseult? Try to imagine all the beautiful women of the world's history as Platonic *idéai*! The "idea," as I say, gained by its acquirement of a body, and, if finally severed from a body at death, it would have lost everything that it had gained. That is what Dr. Westcott in the "Gospel of the Resur-

* Swinburne's "Tristram of Lyonesse."

“rection” saw so clearly, though, of course, he approached the subject from quite another point of view, arguing as a theologian and not as a poet. But it does his keen thought-power great honour that at the time he wrote* he so strongly realised that if we are to live as conscious human beings after death, we must have some definite sort of body after death. This fact seems strangely to have escaped the notice of all theosophic and neo-Buddhistic writers of the school of Mr. A. P. Sinnett, piercing and subtle though much of their abstract thought undoubtedly is.

We often talk idly as if an “angel,” a “disembodied spirit,” was necessarily a being greater and more exalted than a human being. “Christ took *not* on Him the nature of angels.” He was not an angel when He rose from the dead, but a transfigured and glorified human being. Christ was “sent,” as the Collect says, “to take upon him our *flesh*”—what a depth of meaning there is in that expression! The “flesh” we are too apt to despise has in it potencies of transformation and transfiguration we little dream of. Here on earth it may be developed, if soul development accompanies and assists it, into something essentially and integrally divine. The life of heaven is not necessarily confined to heaven. It may be lived upon earth. The soul, working ever from within, may so transfuse and penetrate the outward flesh that it may

* The “Gospel of the Resurrection,” I think, appeared about the year 1865. My copy is the “Third Edition,” and is dated 1874.

be gradually transformed into a higher kind of matter. The Iseult of the poem, the Iseult whom Tristram watched and worshipped, is not an impossible being. She has existed, and exists.

The question of the historic development of the love-faculty, as evidenced among the poets, is so important that it may be worth while to look yet a little further into the subject. The critic I have already quoted, speaking of my version of Shakespeare's and Rossetti's ideas of love, said: "We differ entirely from Mr. Barlow's conclusion that the conception of love held by Rossetti and Shelley is higher than that of Shakespeare. The author of 'Romeo and Juliet' and the 'Sonnets' cannot be made to yield his laurels in that matter." But in the matter of a spiritual conception of love, Shakespeare surely has no laurels to lose. Search from end to end of his sonnets. You will not find the faintest idea of any resurrection of love, any persistence of noble passion beyond the grave. If we really dismiss prejudice, and open our eyes to fact, we shall be simply astonished at the progress in the idea of love which has been made since Shakespeare's time. Rossetti's sonnets—and Marston's also—nearly all related to love that may survive, more than that, to love that may first reveal itself in its pure and passionate fulness, beyond the grave. It is the same with Mrs. Browning's sonnets:—

"If God please,

I shall but love thee better after death,"

she says at the close of one.

In a word, such poets as Shelley, Browning, Mrs. Browning, Rossetti, Marston, whatever their views as to dogma may have been, were essentially Christian poets, and were writing in the Christian spirit. Shakespeare, on the other hand, in his sonnets—the question of the plays is a wider one—was thinking and loving and writing as a pagan. For him love ended with the grave; indeed, it ended, he believed, with the decay and change naturally—to him they seemed natural—attendant upon growing old. To the Christian, decay and death do not seem natural, but unnatural, a reversal of the right and original order of things. The Christian, by his mode of thought, is inevitably led to connect death, decay, change, deterioration, with sin, error, aberration of some kind,—some violation, whether conscious or unconscious, of physical or moral law.

Shakespeare's only notion of love's immortality seems to have been the subjective immortality which he believed that his verse would bestow upon the woman he loved:—

“ But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest ;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest :
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, *and this gives life to thee.*”

Where is there any notion of spiritual love in that? The idea of any personal survival is entirely wanting. As I have said, Shakespeare did not appear to be able even to conceive of it.

There are ghosts and phantoms in the plays, but these belong to a different sphere altogether. The love described in the sonnets seems utterly cold and passionless by the white fire of passionately concentrated adoration which we find in Rossetti's sonnets. Shakespeare was actually content to conceive of the woman he loved as dust and ashes, food for worms, mixed for ever with corruption. The love that so purifies the soul that it becomes capable of mingling with the purified spirit that has passed the gate of death was, apparently, as completely out of the reach of Shakespeare, both imaginatively and practically, as it was out of the reach of Horace

“How pure at heart and sound in head,
With what divine affections bold
Should be the man whose thought would hold
An hour's communion with the dead :”

So said Tennyson in “In Memoriam.” But in Shakespeare's sonnets there is no sign that the author ever even aspired to becoming “pure” enough to hold “communion with the dead.” He paused at the iron terrible barrier which Death places in the path of love. There is no light of resurrection in his sonnets. The positive idea of living again in our offspring is there, but that is all.

Take the sonnet usually printed second in the collections :—

“When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery, so gaz'd on now,
Will be a tatter'd weed, of small worth held !

Then being ask'd where all the beauty lies,
 Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,—
 To say, within thine own deep-sunken eyes,
 Were an all-eating shame and thriftless praise.
 How much more praise deserv'd thy beauty's use,
 If thou couldst answer—'This fair child of mine
 Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse,'—
 Proving his beauty by succession thine !
 This were to be new-made when thou art old,
 And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold."

How unspeakably dismal and repellent this is ! It chants no hymn of triumphant conquest over death, it simply acquiesces, almost exults, in the phenomena of decay and dissolution. It is as morbid and despairing as some of the verse of Baudelaire, or Verlaine, or François Villon. Where is the trumpet of passionate victory that rang out in Rossetti's great words :—

" O nearest, furthest ! Can there be
 At length some hard-earned heart-won home,
 Where,—exile changed for sanctuary,—
 Our lot may fill indeed its sum,
And you may wait and I may come ? "

or even in poor blind Philip Marston's :—

" Then said a voice unto me, without sound,
 ' So may the hope, long sought and never found,
 Come when the last great darkness closes round—
 Come, and be apprehended by thy soul,
 That thou mayst say, *So meet we, she and I ' "* ?

I think I have made it clear that, in spite of the immense reverence we must always feel for the incomparable dramatic genius of Shakespeare and the large powers of the men of his

time, it is impossible, if we look closely into the matter, to escape the conclusion that in the conception of love there has been an enormous development, or, rather, a steadily increasing penetration into the love-sphere of the great Christian idea of resurrection, the idea of indefinite glorification and ennobling of the body, without the loss of anything necessarily or inherently human. Rossetti, in the "Stream's Secret," in his sonnets, in the "Blessed Damozel," and in other poems, carried human love into the strange region that lies beyond the grave. He was not content to acquiesce in the victory of darkness, and because his love was so nobly fashioned that it could challenge even death, he has brought back tidings "from very far," and has taught us things that Shakespeare never knew.

Since the above was written, a thoughtful article has appeared in the *Christian World* entitled, "The Religious Affections," in which my paper "On the Higher Love" is criticised. I should like to have spoken very fully in reply to it, but can only now say that the writer seems again to have fallen into the curious mistake of confounding "Platonic love" with the "higher love" of which I was speaking. He says: "How could it have been possible for the earlier poets to have been unaware of this conception, when they had behind them the New Testament, and Plato, and the religious aspirations of all the ages?"

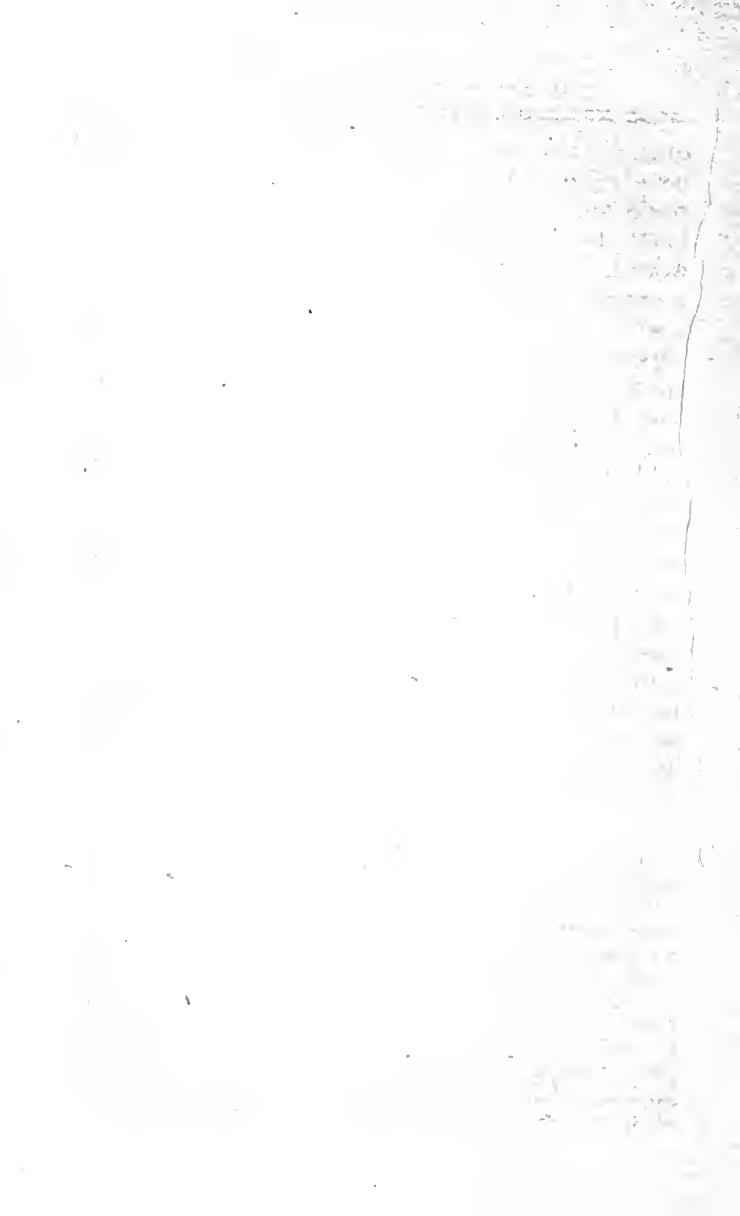
That is a headlong plunge into the terrible confusion of ideas which has done, and is doing,

so much harm. I think that I have very clearly shown that Plato's doctrine of love is *not* the doctrine of the New Testament, but, on the contrary, its absolute antithesis. The poets of the sixteenth century, in Italy and England, were not dealing with the New Testament idea, but merely with the Platonic reaction from sensuality—a very different thing. The spiritualisation of the actual senses is an idea involved in the very structure of Christianity, the New Testament is penetrated by it. Very probably Christ *did*, in some way beyond our understanding, make such a spiritualisation for the first time possible upon earth. But I am very certain that this idea, though operating in the sphere of religion as such, hardly operated in the region of poetic love till the time of Shelley. The "Epipsychidion" is not a Platonic poem. It is a poem of passionate human love *not* discrowned of humanness, but with all its human elements in process of transformation into higher, but none the less human elements.* St. Augustine,

* This is exactly the process described over and over again in Dr. Westcott's book. It is quite curious that the writer, with his large powers of generalisation, should not have seen how wonderfully some modern poetry confirmed and illustrated his thesis. The matter is of immense ethical importance, for, if I am right, our present nerve-structure contains within it the potentiality of spiritual nerve-structure, and our present senses are actually angelic senses in the germ. I need hardly point out how completely this traverses the monkish and ascetic view, which, if rigidly carried out, would set in movement a wholly retrograde process, and would lead to the coarsening of material struc-

of whom the writer in the *Christian World* speaks, never touched this side of the subject. He could not, for the time was not ripe for it. We know by his "Confessions" that his idea of woman was not an exalted one—it was, in fact, a monk's idea—and that his highest notion of purity was the mere negative notion of the stern suppression of the passions, which, properly speaking, is not a Christian conception at all. The union of the religious and the artistic faculty was impossible in those ages, and even now it is almost impossible. But in such rarely organised men as Victor Hugo, Rossetti, Shelley, and a few others, we see some anticipation of what may be. In Victor Hugo's wonderful work, "*Dieu*," we find the rapture of the religious mystic and the passion of the poet combined. But the combination of intense purity, intense passion, and intense religious feeling which we discern in Hugo was not possible until the world had been for nearly two thousand years saturated, so to speak, with ideas and principles derived directly from Christianity.

tures which are, on the contrary, intended to be indefinitely refined, and so brought ever nearer and nearer to the angelic level. If we are conscious of the fragrance of a rose or a lily, the finer nerves of an angel might be conscious of a finer degree of the same fragrance: conscious, in fact, of what we may term the soul, the soul-fragrance, of the rose or lily. We find this intensely developed sensitiveness of the nerves to flower-fragrance throughout Shelley, and, often, in poets of the Celtic races. Their nerves are able to take up what I should venture to call the spiritual aroma of the flower, the "odour beyond the sense."



III

THE FEMININE ELEMENT IN DEITY

“THE God-force, in the fulness of its new
“descent, cannot act freely on the
“celibacy of human nature as it has existed in
“previous ages. The divine accession prepares
“as it comes, and comes as it prepares; and
“thus before and with its coming now is inter-
“involved the return into this world of the dual
“existence of the real man The quality
“of the intense vitality which God presses down
“upon us at this hour, burns with some fuller
“ardour of His sex-completeness than the world
“could receive before, and it cannot enter with
“its full perfectness the widowed breast.”

These passages, taken from Laurence Oliphant's
“Sympneumata,” seem to me to contain the
key to many of the strangest confusions of human
thought and deepest mysteries of human history.
There can be no doubt that, for centuries past,
the world has been what may be called a male
world; the masculine method of regarding things
has been the prominent and dominant method,
and the feminine instincts have either been
altogether ignored, or have been rudely held in
subjection. The fact that Womanhood, divine

Womanhood, forms a portion of Godhead, though indicated in the clearest terms in the Hebrew version of the Old Testament, has been almost entirely lost sight of in our translation. Almost the only passage in which the idea has been preserved is the passage in the first chapter of Genesis: "And God [Elohim, the dual] said, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness. . . . So God [Elohim] created man in "His own image, in the image of God [Elohim] "created He him; male and female created "He *them*."

But the dual name of God* is used in many other passages in the Mosaic books, and frequently, though less often, by the prophets. It is obvious that when we translate a term which implies a dual nature in the Deity by the simple word "God," we do not convey to an English reader its fulness of meaning.

Now why is it that the distinct and direct

* "The most familiar illustrations of an early perception of the dual nature of the divinity, are to be found in the Judaic literature. The early mention of God is almost invariably Elohim, that is to say, the dual God, this form being the Hebrew plural, which in its unassisted sense means two—not many, as it is popularly rendered." Laurence Oliphant's "Sym-pneumata," p. 69.—See also, in the Appendix to Oliphant's "Scientific Religion," some interesting observations on the use of the Hebrew word "Shaddai" in the Book of Job; a word which, in the English version, has been inadequately translated "Almighty."—The late Paul Hershon, a Jew, who knew the Talmud as well as or better than most Christians know their New Testament, used to say that the esoteric doctrine of Judaism was of a duality in the Divine Nature.

presence of the feminine nature in the Divinity, thus unmistakably implied in the Hebrew terminology, has been, as it were, kept back for so many centuries, concealed from the general apprehension of mankind? Is it due to accident, or was it part of the divine purpose that the most sacred and wonderful fact that the universe contains should be veiled until humanity had reached a point when it might be proclaimed without danger of misunderstanding and profanation? Or, again, was it due to the action of evil powers, who desired to suppress the knowledge of a fact which, if apprehended in its full and sweet significance, would straightway lead to the redemption of woman, and, through her, to the redemption and purification of the entire human race?

Of this, at any rate, there can be no doubt—that woman herself has, even to-day, hardly the faintest idea of the divine inner truths of her own nature, and of her own high prerogatives. Roughly speaking, women may be divided into three classes: the ordinary or commonplace class, generally somewhat colourless in character, and for the most part taking their ideas of themselves from the ideas of men around them; the baser group, who play upon the passions of men; and the more intellectual section, who tend to drift away from the truer and gentler womanhood, and to become gradually assimilated to the masculine type. In no one of these groups shall we find the real woman; the divine child-womanhood, the womanhood through which God pours the passionately pure vital currents of what we

may reverently call His own sex-nature, is not present in any of them.

The truth probably is that the development of the race has only lately reached a point at which it was possible to allow the stronger and more ardent currents of divine magnetism to penetrate human frames without risk of injury to the human organism, or deflection into wrong channels. For centuries after the failure of Greece and Rome to produce a pure and abiding conception of what sex-love at its highest ought to be, it was possible to work, if one may so express oneself, only by the negative method. "Thou shalt *not*" had to be the watchword. Greece and Rome had failed so signally, and had sunk into such abysses of debauchery, that we can understand that the long reaction into asceticism, in spite of the lamentable errors that accompanied it, may have been a necessity of human progress. The Greek worship of beauty was premature. Centuries had to elapse before it could be once more brought to the front with safety. The Renaissance did something towards this end, but was also in some measure premature.

"Yea, once we had sight of another: but now she is queen, say these.

Not as thine, not as thine was our mother, a blossom
of flowering seas,

Clothed round with the world's desire as with raiment,
and fair as the foam,

And fleeter than kindled fire, and a goddess, and
mother of Rome.

For thine came pale and a maiden, and sister to sorrow;
but ours,

Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour
of flowers,
White rose of the rose-white water, a silver splendour,
a flame,
Bent down unto us that besought her, and earth grew
sweet with her name."

In these well-known and most beautiful lines from Mr. Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine," we have the Greek and the Christian idea contrasted, but the worship of beauty in them is utterly, intensely pure. It is the thing we want in this drab and prosaic modern world, given over daily more and more, as it is, to selfish commercialism and the sordid pursuit of material comfort. We want the passionate love and worship of Beauty: we are perishing for lack of the old Greek adoration of form and reverence for the human.

Charles Kingsley was a thinker organically fitted to grasp the human truth which his great opponent, John Henry Newman, was wholly unable to perceive. Charles Kingsley was a more complete being, and was able to approach God through channels which Newman could not avail himself of. As Kingsley was never weary of asseverating, noble marriage-love teaches divine secrets which the ascetic, however exalted he may be in his own more limited sphere, can never even dream of. Kingsley, in his historic conflict with Newman and the Roman Catholic Church, hardly realised the immense strength of his own position. It does not seem to have occurred to him that the numberless instances in the Bible in which the Hebrew word for God

is a term of dual meaning really more than proved his case. If God be a bi-une Being, asceticism and celibacy must be direct contraventions of His nature.

Moreover, it is evident that the thinker who in the "Dream of Gerontius" suffered himself to pen the following lines :—

*"As though a thing, who for his help
Must needs possess a wife,
Could cope with those proud rebel hosts
Who had angelic life,"*

could never really have understood, was never really capable of understanding, the potential holiness of woman, the potential sanctity of love and marriage. The lines I have italicised—though written, I suppose, with sincere religious intention—seem to indicate a singular want of grasp of the nature of the God who created love and woman ; who created man and woman in his own image, in his own form, and bestowed upon them a portion of his own attributes. They represent a strictly limited and male—not a truly masculine—view of the universe. "Neither "is the man without the woman, neither the woman "without the man, in the Lord," St Paul said, and this is the truer and higher view.

I think one may add that it is possible that in the very fact that man is capable of noble passion—in the fact that man, as Newman roughly puts it, "must needs possess a wife"—lies his grandeur, and his distinction from the "rebel "hosts " who, by their fall, may have lost touch with the inner sweetness, the feminine element,

in Divinity, and, in so doing, may have excluded themselves from Paradise and that "Paradisaic state" which Kingsley believed was one with the state of ideal marriage.

The teaching of Swedenborg upon these points was extraordinarily lucid and impressive. Though he wrote so many years ago, he may almost be said to have combined in his rendering of the universe the truths of modern physiology and those expressed by St. Paul. Swedenborg is nothing if not physiological. He even anticipated some of the discoveries of modern science.

Now, as to divine dualism and the expression of divine dualism in angelic humanity, his view is in exact accord with the views held by the most thoughtful psychical teachers of to-day. He believed that at the head of the heavenly hierarchy there are two classes of angels, the Spiritual and the Celestial. The Spiritual angels manifest knowledge in its highest embodiments. The Celestial angels belong to a still loftier order, and represent the highest incarnation of the love-principle. He also believed that marriage exists among angels as upon earth, and that the noblest attainable felicity was only to be reached through perfectly pure, and also perfectly passionate, conjugal—or, as he calls it, conjugal—love. In this he was exactly at one with Kingsley.*

* "The expression of love produces happiness; therefore, the more perfect the expression the greater the happiness! And, therefore, bliss greater than any we can know here awaits us in heaven. And does not the course of nature point to this? What else is

A high, but inferior order of angels, Swedenborg thought, were unable to grasp the conjugal idea, and found happiness in the single or unwedded condition. To such a class many saints and mystics, both male and female, would belong. To them the more passionate class of angels would appear over-ardent. To the more loving group of beings, the other class would appear cold and defective. Each type of character would, in fact, repel and be misunderstood by the other. (This is exactly what happens among the corresponding types of human beings, upon earth.)

If Swedenborg and Charles Kingsley were right, it is clear that the whole of human life must be regarded from a new point of view. Human life becomes a thing no longer entirely separated from the spiritual life. It becomes an integral part of it. The soul is no longer to be looked upon as wholly distinct from the body.

the meaning of the gradual increase of love on earth? What else is the meaning of old age, when the bodily powers die, while the love increases? What does that point to, but to a restoration of the body when mortality is swallowed up of life? Is not that mortality of the body sent us mercifully by God, to teach us that our love is spiritual, and therefore will be able to express itself in any state of existence? to wean our hearts that we may learn to look for more perfect bliss in the perfect body? . . . Do not these thoughts take away from all earthly bliss the poisoning thought, 'all this must end'? Ay, end! but only end so gradually that we shall not miss it, and the less perfect union on earth shall be replaced in heaven by perfect and spiritual bliss and union, inconceivable because perfect!"—Extract from one of Charles Kingsley's letters.

The flesh is no longer to be thought of as opposed to the spirit. Soul and body are developing together, harmoniously and by means of each other.

But the chief subject upon which we gain light from modern physiology, regarded from Swedenborg's point of view, is that of marriage. Marriage, where the love is perfectly noble and pure, must be eternal, and in some divinely grand and unimagined mode must find means to express itself, its joy, its passion, its craving for perfect oneness, its tenderness, through organic channels—through complete and ecstatic blending of masculine and feminine atomic structures, and mingling of masculine and feminine magnetic currents.

This is really the teaching of all the great passional poets of the world's history—of Hugo, of Tennyson, of Dante, of Shelley, of Rossetti—though they may not themselves have fully apprehended the meaning of their own dreams and intuitions. It is curious to find the idea set forth with exceptional clearness in the writings of one who was not a great poet, but who is now chiefly memorable as having provided Tennyson with a model for the metre of "In Memoriam"—Lord Herbert of Cherbury.

In the exact metre of "In Memoriam" Lord Herbert wrote :—

" Oh ! no, beloved, I am most sure
These virtuous habits we acquire,
As being with the soul entire,
Must with it evermore endure.

" Else should our souls in vain elect,
And vainer yet were Heaven's laws,
When to an everlasting cause
They give a perishing effect.

" Not here on earth, then, nor above,
Our good affections can impair,
For where God doth admit the fair,
Think you that He excludeth love ?

" These eyes again these eyes shall see,
These hands again these hands enfold,
And all chaste blessings can be told
Shall with us everlasting be.

" For if no use of sense remain
When bodies once their life forsake,
Or they could no delight partake,
Why should they ever rise again ? " *

I think it will be admitted that the theory of angelic marriage is here enunciated with startling clearness. If it be true, if the words " till death " us do part " are really based upon a strange misapprehension, how profoundly careful as to our conduct here upon earth we ought to be ! If a companion upon earth once chosen is, or may become, a companion for ever, or if, on the other hand, we may by our own heedlessness and misconduct lose one who might have been the joy of our hearts, the bestower of unknown sweet-

* How different was the hopeless despair of Catullus :

*" Soles occidere et redire possunt ;
Nobis, cum semel occidit brevis lux,
Nox est perpetua una dormienda."*

Such a feeling as this would of itself tend to lower and degrade the love-passion.

ness throughout eternity, what care should be taken in the choice of an earthly partner ! That partner once chosen, what guardian watchfulness can possibly be too eager, what conception of the holiness of marriage can possibly be too exalted !

I do not forget that Jesus said : "*When they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage ; but are as the angels which are in heaven.*" But the very question is as to what the angels in heaven are. They may, in some instances, as Kingsley believed, be continuing and consummating, with infinite joy, marriage-unions, the initial stages of which took place, and could only take place, upon earth. We cannot conceive of the abandonment of any integral portion of our humanity, except as a definite and irretrievable loss. On the other hand, we can conceive of the gradual spiritualisation of the whole of our humanity, of the gradual uplifting of that portion of our nature which the mystics call "the animal soul" by "the human soul," and, again, of the exaltation of these two "souls" or principles in conjunction by a third still higher principle : the "spiritual soul," which may itself be in connection with a still loftier medium, actual "spirit."

If this line of thought be the true line, if the body is indeed "the temple of the Holy Ghost," our whole method of regarding physical things will have to be amended and reconsidered. Battle fields, hospitals, starving or plague-stricken myriads—the mind can hardly bear to dwell upon the thoughts connected with these, when it once realises the unutterable holiness which, from the

highest point of view, is resident in the bodily frame of man. Defiled and desecrated as it is, it still stands forth as, potentially, the vehicle of spirit, the one and only means by which soul, and the yearnings of soul, may find conscious outlet. St. Paul did not desire to be "*unclothed*," but "*clothed upon*." The whole point, the difference, we may almost say, between eternal life and eternal death, lies in that distinction.

It is, indeed, impossible to overstate the magnitude of the divergence between the opposing views. Mr. A. P. Sinnett, the learned and able theosophist, in his two remarkable books, "*The Growth of the Soul*" and "*Esoteric Buddhism*," has given an immense impetus to the belief that the highest heavenly felicity consists in a condition of subjective meditation, of illimitable progress in knowledge. To those who are drawn towards Kingsley's and Swedenborg's form of thought—and I think I may add the Christian form of thought, with its strong insistence on a dual humanness in the Divine nature—such a conception of heaven appears unutterably cold and dreary. I cannot imagine anything more forbidding and desolate than the Buddhist *Kama loca* and *Devachan*; those spheres of refined and attenuated spiritual existence in which, according to Mr. Sinnett, we are to spend millions of years, passively contemplating the effect of the deeds done during the extremely limited period of our probation upon earth. To me *Kama loca* seems like an ice-field, and *Devachan* a series of snow-clad summits. The absence of

warm human life, of throbbing human emotion, makes these vast areas of subjective existence appear to an artist unspeakably dismal and uninviting. In the reaction from such extremes one almost craves for the brightly-lighted *auditorium* of Drury Lane Theatre, or the familiar sound of a London organ.

No ; to artists and those who think with them, it will always seem that the Christian conception of the angelic life must be nearer the truth ; or, at any rate, they will always hope that it may be so. Love, tenderness, sympathy, pity—these seem to us the highest qualities which can possibly be manifested either here or hereafter, and they certainly cannot be manifested without forms wherethrough they may be expressed. Knowledge is good, but to know the exact truth concerning the cosmic “life-waves,” the various “rounds” of existence, the “cyclic periods,” the immeasurable *manvantaras*, and the rest of the Buddhistic paraphernalia, would not convey such pleasure to me as springs up in my heart at the sight of a perfect face, or a beautiful flower. Christ “took our nature upon “Him,” our sad struggling human nature, with all its sorrows and pangs, all its efforts and aspirations, and I venture to believe that a single human soul, yes a single human body, with the infinite capacity of each for joy and agony, is of more value in the sight of God than the whole glittering army of soulless suns and stars and comets and meteors.

It is very curious and instructive to notice

the way in which the instinct of the Roman Catholic Church has acted in the matter of the divine dualism—or perhaps it would be more correct to say, the instinct of a considerable portion of humanity acting through the Roman Church. There has evidently always been a deep feeling in the human race that the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God did not fully meet human needs, or satisfy human yearning. Human beings, especially at moments of grief and anguish, crave for the sympathy, the gentleness, the tenderness of motherhood. This gentleness, tenderness, sympathy, must in some way, men thought, be resident in the Divine Being. The Roman Church endeavoured to meet the craving by enunciating the dogma of the Virgin Mother of God. This, without interfering with the doctrine of God the Father, introduced the attributes of feminine tenderness and sweetness into Divinity, or what was regarded and worshipped as Divinity. We know how, for century after century, the Southern nations, especially the women of the Southern nations, have found comfort and help through believing that their sorrows are sympathised with and their burthens shared by the tenderly loving heart of the Virgin. It is the same idea—the same inward pressure has produced it—the idea of the Divine Femininity.

Frederick Robertson, in his sermon, “On the “Glory of the Virgin Mother,” touched upon this point. But he, being a Protestant, took another course. He recognised the necessity of seeking and finding the feminine element in Deity. But he asserted that it should be sought and found,

not in the Virgin Mary, but in Christ, the softer and tenderer side of whose character provided us, he thought, with the needed blending of the feminine and the divine.

Those who have studied the writings of Theodore Parker, the great American Theistic preacher, will remember that in his very beautiful prayers he always addressed God as the "Father and Mother of the Universe." He was much attached to his own mother, and those who have known what a mother's love may really mean will never be content without ascribing motherhood, and the tenderness of motherhood, to God.

"Thine eyes shall see the King *in His beauty*." We may perhaps feel that the beauty of stainless moral holiness is here referred to. But my whole point is that stainless moral holiness and spotless physical beauty ought to go together. That, as yet, they do not, they cannot, only proves the radical imperfection of human nature, and the extent to which we have hitherto failed to blend the various parts of our complex and intricate humanity into one harmonious whole.

When Mr. Swinburne wrote, in "*Laus Veneris*"—

"Alas, Lord, surely thou art great and fair.

But lo her wonderfully woven hair !

And thou didst heal us with thy piteous kiss ;
But see now, Lord ; her mouth is lovelier,"

he was picturing a contrast, a collision of qualities and faculties, which ought never to exist. The

dual conception of the Divine Being delivers us, once and for all, from such difficulties. The "wonderfully woven hair" and the "piteous kiss" are both sacred, both full of spiritual meaning, both Divine. St. Bernard looked out upon the world and came to the conclusion that men were "stinking spawn, sacks of dung, food for worms." That was how a mediæval saint could regard life. But the truth must be far, far otherwise. Walt Whitman, for all his wild exaggeration, was nearer to it. He "certainly felt the truth of that deep saying of Thoreau, that for him to whom sex is impure there are no flowers in Nature. He cannot help speaking of man's or woman's life in terms of Nature's life, of Nature's life in terms of man's; he mingles them together with an admirably balanced rhythm." *

It is well sometimes to realise how far in advance of us other nations are in apprehending the wonder and mystery of form, that is, from the higher religious point of view, the wonder and mystery of the image of the dual God, revealed in man and woman. It has been rightly said that there is "a magnetism in curves." I have no doubt that French sculptors and painters are actually magnetised by the beauty of "the one ineffable line" that Arthur O'Shaughnessy the poet wrote of. The profuseness with which the form-sense manifests itself in France is almost bewildering. Often, no doubt, in the drawings scattered broadcast day by day and week by week

* "The New Spirit." By Havelock Ellis.

through the teeming pages of French books and papers, that miraculously prolific form-sense runs over into grossness. But this comes from want of grasp of the very truth which I am so anxiously endeavouring to insist upon; the truth that beauty is in its essence a spiritual thing, and that we may approach the Divine through a noble worship of ideal form-perfection. It is not because they love and worship form that the French fail and drift into coarseness, but because they do not love and worship form enough. It has not to them the deep religious significance which it had to the Greeks.

We can hardly believe that monks and nuns, men destitute of natural manhood and "women "withered out of sex," can be types of the primal angelic manhood and womanhood of an unfallen race. Nor, on the other hand, can I conceive of angels as half women, half birds, bearing upon their shoulders immense wings—as depicted in the ordinary religious illustrations. To me it seems rather that the true angelic ideal, the true human semblance of the divine, must be found in such statues as the Greeks moulded, in such paintings as those of Titian and Michael Angelo. It is not unlikely that perfect human beauty is the most perfect beauty that the stellar universe has evolved, or can evolve, and that angelic beauty is simply human beauty with the glory of holiness superadded. It is probably impossible to imagine beauty nobler, tenderer, sweeter, purer, than that which irradiates some of the Madonnas of Raphael. When we say that such beauty is divine—or when we say that the splendour of a

Greek Psyche or Apollo is divine—we are not using merely a metaphor, a form of words. We are expressing the literal truth. The ascetic ideal is not an ascent, but a descent. As heaven is approached the curves of beauty should become more subtle, not coarser, the nerves of sensation more sensitive and capable of registering finer impressions, the powers of manhood and womanhood not weaker, but at once purer and stronger. It would be a strange heaven in which the fragrance of flowers ceased to delight, and beauty of form lost its charm and its magic.

A point of extreme importance, closely connected with the subject we are considering, is that we now seem to be justified in inferring that the action of the Divine Nature upon our own is in some sort a material action.* The phenomena which accompany what in religious circles is spoken of as “conversion,” are phenomena which, absolutely real and significant, proceed by definite laws, laws as definite as those which govern the action of electricity. There are, in fact, divine electrical currents, currents which impinge upon the soul-nerves of human beings in a recipient condition, and produce their unerring and wonderful results.

It is perfectly plain that if, with many deep spiritual thinkers, we are to hold that the tenderest and purest divine love-currents can only be communicated to humanity through the specially refined and delicate atomic structure of woman, she

* Henry Drummond, in his most suggestive “Natural Law in the Spiritual World,” very nearly arrived at this conclusion.

is lifted to a place in creation hitherto undreamed of, and becomes a being potentially of angelic importance and angelic attributes. I think that the world's best poetry not only confirms the theory, but in fact suggests and even proclaims it. I think the truth may be found implicit in Shelley's verses, in much of Swinburne's noblest poetry, in Mrs. Browning's poems, in the poems of Keats, of Hugo,* and of many others. I think it was also conveyed in much of the more mystical and less clearly understood teaching of St. Paul. And I think the real obstacle to the full apprehension of the truth lies in the dulness, the petty jealousies, and the want of faith of woman herself.

We may gather from all this how utterly foolish and futile the ascetic attempt to expel sex from the universe has been. It is far more probable that sex, sex in Deity, represented in the world of matter by the ceaseless interchange of electrical affinities, is the underlying fact upon which the whole cosmos reposes, than that sex is at any point absent from the universal scheme. Love, as Dante said, "drives the sun and stars along." If there were no such thing as sex—if the sex-element could be extirpated from the universe—it is not unlikely that the whole immeasurable structure would collapse.† We may be pretty

* "*Aimez donc, car tout le proclame,
Car l'esprit seul éclaire peu ;
Et souvent le coeur d'une femme
Est l'explication de Dieu.*"

† "*Ote aux forces l'aimant,
Ote la clef de voûte, et vois l'éroulement !*"

Victor Hugo's "*Dieu.*"

confident that a universe containing no feminine life-vibrations would either be an impossible universe, or, if possible, it would be a universe of an inferior and degraded type.*

The most highly-wrought and poetic natures do, in effect, combine the masculine and feminine attributes. Mere maleness is not a noble thing. It is a coarse and crude thing. From its unchecked action in the world all evil things have sprung ; wars, greed, cruelty, injustice, falseness, corruption. Human history may, from the religious

* "Two of the great active forces on our planet, we are told, are Nutrition and Reproduction. That the latent possibilities of the idea of sex exist in these factors it would be difficult to deny. . . . We are told that the universe is matter and power. Power and matter are the scientific parallels for the 'Intelligence' and 'Wisdom' of the Kabbalists. In the Sephiroth of the Kabbala the 'Crown' is called 'En Soph'—the manifestation of Deity in creation. In it are supposed to reside the life and dynamic power of the universe. The first two emanations of the 'Crown'—on the right hand and on the left—are 'Binah' and 'Chocmah'—(Intelligence and Wisdom). These are masculine and feminine. Wisdom (Chocmah—the 'Sophia' of the Early Church) is feminine. . . . All that is attempted is to show the ancient division of the Supreme Cause into two 'emanations'—masculine and feminine. These emanations—Intelligence and Wisdom—correspond in their primal importance with the Power and Matter, the Attraction and Repulsion of the scientist." That is a most suggestive passage from an exceptionally interesting and thoughtful book, Clifford Harrison's "Notes on the Margins." It will be seen at once how strongly it bears on the ideas and opinions advanced in the text. The fact is that the old mystic writings of the world are vast treasure-houses of knowledge, which we are as yet only beginning to explore.

point of view, almost be regarded as a record of the long striving of the Holy Spirit, the Divine Feminine, to penetrate with its pure sunlight the gloom and darkness accruing from the lusts and wickedness of men. In Jesus Christ we find—as Robertson pointed out—a combination of the masculine and feminine characteristics. “*Jesus wept.*” “When He beheld the city, “*He wept over it.*” Yes; but that weeping was not the mark of a weak or morbidly sensitive disposition. It was not cowardly or hysterical weeping. It was the natural expression of a heart overflowing with love and pity. It was feminine—in the noblest sense—but it was not effeminate. It was the visible outcome of a mystery which the writer believes to lie at the very root of all human and cosmic mysteries, the mystery of the Divine Feminine in God.

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